


OCCASIONAL PAPERS  
ON THE HISTORY OF  
BOSTON COLLEGE

BOSTON COLLEGE  
AND  
THE LAWRENCE FAMILY



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The Chestnut Hill property that Father Thomas I. Gasson, S.J., thirteenth president of Boston College, purchased in December 1907, had belonged in the nineteenth century to a distinguished member of the Lawrence family, Amos Adams Lawrence. If that accident of ownership were the only relationship between the Lawrences and Boston College, there would hardly be a need for an essay on the subject. But the connection between Boston College and the Lawrences — particularly Amos Lawrence — is important in the University's history and deserves remembering.

Amos Lawrence's father is called one of the first merchant princes of Massachusetts. He and a brother established cotton and woolen factories in Lawrence, a town that took their name. In the year 1814 the elder Lawrence and his wife, Sarah, became the parents of a son, named Amos after his father and Adams after his maternal grandfather. The date of birth may not have had special meaning to the family, but Amos Adams was born on July 31, the feast of St. Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus. Thus, that birth date may have been an omen of the benign connection between the infant and the Jesuits who, some decades later, would come to Boston to establish a college.

Amos Adams' father and his uncle, Abbott Lawrence, set a splendid example of enlightened philanthropy as their manufacturing business prospered, and they no doubt influenced the values of young Lawrence. In 1835, when a senior at Harvard, Amos soberly set down his personal philosophy:<sup>1</sup>

My present design is to be a merchant, not a plodding, narrow-minded one pent up in a city, with my mind always on the counting-room. . . . My advantages for becoming rich are great: if I have mercantile tact enough to carry on the immense though safe machine which my father and uncle have put in operation, it will turn out gold to me as fast as I could wish: and to be rich would be my delight. I consider it an oyster-like dulness, and not a pious or enlightened way of thinking, that makes some despise riches. If anyone has any love for his fellow creatures, any love of the worthy respect of his neighborhood, he will be willing and

glad to be rich. . . . A good man will willingly endure the labor of taking care of his property for the sake of others whom he can so much benefit from it, but his thoughts and fears will not be perpetually on the alert that he may not lose a dollar and may not make all he can.

After graduation Amos indeed became rich, first as a selling agent for leading textile mills in Massachusetts and later by owning mills of his own. As we shall see, he matched and perhaps surpassed his father in philanthropy.

During a trip to Europe in 1840, Amos Lawrence spent some time in Ireland. Despite that "feeling at home" in England "which a common blood and language create in every intelligent American,"<sup>2</sup> Lawrence was scathing about British mistreatment of the Irish — and this six years before the gruesome famine. In a letter to his father, he wrote:

The country of Ireland is in many parts beautiful, but of the wretchedness and suffering of the people, one who has not seen it can hardly form an idea. . . . One is surprised and incensed at the supineness of the English Parliament and people, as well as the Irish nobility and proprietors [that is, the British-imposed overlords], in not feeling more for these 7,000,000 of their fellow-beings [reduced to half that number within a decade], and at their love of power, which impels them to hold under taxation a country suffering to such an extremity.

And then Lawrence, whose ancestors had fought in the American revolution only sixty-five years earlier, added: "To be a Radical is natural enough when one sees such an abuse of power, and to hope for a revolution or war which will overthrow this system of government is not unreasonable in the Irish."<sup>3</sup>

Abuse of alcohol was rampant in Ireland, and at the time of Lawrence's visit a priest, Father Theobald Mathew, was an effective apostle of temperance. Lawrence displayed remarkable religious sensitivity in attending one of Father Mathew's temperance services and in his reverent report of it to his father. In a passage of the letter, immediately following the part quoted above criticizing English treatment of the Irish, Amos wrote:<sup>4</sup>

But the most singular thing is the temperance revolution, and the wonder of the age is Father Mathew. I have heard and seen him very satisfactorily, and think with his audience that it was the greatest spectacle I have ever witnessed. Today I sat very near him by means of Father O'Reilly, and not only saw the

whole, but took notes of all his sermon, which was excellent. He is a good-looking man about forty-five, florid face, curly black hair, and a Roman nose, with a good-humored expression. He was rather late, owing to the pressure of the people, but when he stepped upon the platform, every voice was hushed and all eyes fixed on him. If he had been an angel from heaven he would not have commanded more attention. I never saw anything like it before. The band of music played a hymn, during which he stood leaning on the altar, looking over the immense concourse, without seeming to feel any awkwardness or any desire to make a display. His dress was a white robe with gold around the neck and on the streamers in front, and his whole appearance was elegant and pleasing. . . . After the hymn he stood out more in front, and delivered his text and sermon, without book or notes. This was sensible and suited to the audience, who showed their approbation by frequent responses and prayers at the end of the sentences. This lasted half an hour, during which I do not think there was a dry eye in the whole assembly, and many were sobbing aloud. I could not tell why, except for the excitement.

He then retired, and the meeting adjourned to a large open place, called the Battery, on the outskirts of the town. Here on the rising ground he addressed them more particularly on the subject of temperance, and administered the pledge; the rush to take this was almost fearful, so that one or two hundred citizen constables were obliged to lay about them with their poles, to prevent being overthrown. . . . For a long distance around, the hills were covered with people dressed in their best clothes (which are not very good). The women with their white caps and bright red cloaks gave a gay appearance to the whole. But the most striking feature in the scene was the sick; these were brought in carts and in litters, and were laid about everywhere upon the grass; their friends were lifting some up on their shoulders, that the sight of the Father might cure them; some were too weak to hold up their heads, and made a ghastly appearance as they were raised up to the light; some seemed in the last stage, and required all the attention of their relations. It was a touching scene to see the eager anxiety of the mothers and sisters, and to hear their prayers for their sons, husbands, and fathers. One was carried back to the times of the Apostles, and could hardly realize that he was not listening to some inspired person.

After seeing the administering of the pledge (which is kept much more sacredly than in the United States), I went around



Amos Adams Lawrence (1814–1886), one of the signers of the 1853 petition supporting Father McElroy. In 1862 he acquired the Chestnut Hill property that was to become the campus of Boston College in the next century.

to hear the conversation of the people, and to ascertain if possible how they were affected. "It is indeed wonderful," said a country proprietor named O'Ferren, with whom I became acquainted, "how these cures take place; the only encouragement Father Mathew has ever given these poor invalids is that



he will pray for them, and yet they believe he can cure by his word or touch, and I know of two boys who were made well in an hour after taking hold of his robe." Seeing three decent looking men talking together, I asked if any person had been cured today. "I know only one," said the man, "but I presume there are more." "Have you seen this person?" said I. "Seen him! and haven't I seen him these three years every day, and never knew him to walk a step and isn't he there now jumping about with them boys yonder?" There was no resisting such evidence as this, and as the boy disappeared into the crowd I had no opportunity of disbelieving. I asked a poor woman, who had brought her son ten miles on her back, if she noticed any change in him. "Not yet," she said; "if it's God's will, he will be cured; we cannot have all we ask for. I hope Father Mathew's prayers may prevail, or at least the sight of such an inspired man may do him good." More than a million adults have taken the pledge; and it is very seldom broken. . . .

For a Boston Yankee, Lawrence proved by his reactions to this visit to Ireland that he was both open-minded and tender-hearted.

The year 1842 was significant for both the future Boston College and Amos Adams Lawrence. In that year the founder of Boston College, Father John McElroy, was invited by Boston's bishop, Benedict Fenwick, to give a retreat to the priests of the diocese. During the retreat, McElroy lived at the bishop's house, and he later recorded that on that occasion he talked with the bishop about a Jesuit college in Boston and found him receptive to the idea.<sup>5</sup> Also in 1842, Amos Lawrence experienced two of the major events in his life: In March he married Sarah Elizabeth Appleton, daughter of William Appleton, a wealthy merchant and banker; and in May he and Sarah were received into the Episcopal church, confirmed by Bishop Griswold.

A few words are in order here both about Harvard and Unitarianism in the nineteenth century to provide the context of Amos Lawrence's support of Father John McElroy in his efforts to found a Catholic college in Boston. In the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Unitarianism is described by our own Father John Willis, professor emeritus of the History Department, as a religious community that neither demanded nor sought doctrinal conformity. "Deeds not creeds" was its motto. It had much in common with the rationalism and skepticism of eighteenth century "enlightenment." Willis cites American historian Charles Beard as noting that "Jefferson, Paine, John Adams, Washington, Franklin and lesser lights [among leaders of the young republic] may be reckoned among the Unitarians or the Deists." Harvard and its divinity school were under the sway of



William Appleton, Amos Lawrence's father-in-law, one of the twenty-five distinguished Bostonians who signed the petition in support of Father McElroy. (*Crayon drawing by Cheney in 1843.*)

Unitarians for much of the nineteenth century. To many orthodox Protestants, Unitarianism was apostasy. In a history of Amherst College, for example, an Amherst alumnus explained why the people of the region established the college in 1821: They wanted a college "not so far west as Williams and not so far towards Plato as Cambridge."<sup>6</sup> Cambridge, of course, meant Harvard, and Plato was cited as a noble but non-Christian thinker.

Being tolerant of — indeed enthusiastic about — differences of opinion, the Unitarians were likely to shun sectarian bickering and the rampant anti-Catholicism and anti-popery of the Protestant Know-Nothing movement of the nineteenth century that greeted Father McElroy in his first efforts to start a college in Boston. Amos Lawrence's son wrote of his father: "A mixed education in Unitarianism and Orthodoxy is not usually conducive to a settled faith, and it is more likely to lead to argument than to piety. Mr. Lawrence had passed through the argumentative phase, and as a result had written,





Edward Everett, United States senator and former president of Harvard, who signed the petition supporting Father McElroy.

'Would that I had a Creed,' but that deep and sincere faith that was found in the Unitarianism as well as the Orthodoxy of that day was Mr. Lawrence's by inheritance, education, and conviction. His devotional spirit had sent him to the Prayer Book, which led him into closer sympathy with the Episcopal Church."<sup>7</sup> And led him to conversion, as previously mentioned, and to having a son and biographer who became Episcopal bishop of Massachusetts.

It was in this religious climate that Bishop Fenwick's successor, Bishop John Fitzpatrick, persuaded the Jesuit provincial in Baltimore



William Prescott, noted historian, who signed the petition supporting Father McElroy. The photograph is of a stained glass representation of Prescott, one of six American historians honored in a window of the chancellor's office in Bapst Library. *(Photograph by Gary Gilbert.)*

to send Father John McElroy with two other Jesuits in 1847 to take over St. Mary's Church in the North End. McElroy was then 65 years old and had already had a distinguished career as pastor, preacher, advisor to bishops, and most recently as chaplain to the American Army in the Mexican War, an appointment requested by President Polk himself. As soon as he was settled in Boston, and with the bishop's blessing, McElroy began collecting from both the Irish immigrants and better-established Bostonians money for a church that would help support a college. By March 1853 he was able to purchase a piece of land that had been the site of the city jail, that jail having been replaced by the imposing but never charming Charles Street jail. But a group of 925 Protestant citizens, whom McElroy called "Know-Nothings" in his diary, protested the sale on a legal technical-

ity. It was in response to this clearly anti-Catholic protest that a counter-petition favoring Father McElroy's purchase of the property was submitted to the city. In numbers the favorable petition could not compare to the negative petition, but although only 25 names were on the pro-McElroy document, they included some of the most influential and respected men of Boston. A few of the most prominent were Edward Everett, former Harvard president, former governor, and U.S. senator at the time of the petition; Rufus Choate, former congressman and U. S. senator; Robert Winthrop, former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; John Collins Warren, dean of Harvard Medical School; George Ticknor, Harvard professor and leader of Boston society; and William Prescott, noted historian of Spain and Mexico. But the petitioners of most significance for this essay were four members of the Lawrence family: Amos Adams Lawrence, later to own the original part of Boston College's Chestnut Hill campus; two uncles, Abbott and Samuel Lawrence; and William Appleton, Amos' father-in-law.

There is no documentary evidence of which the writer is aware as to who was the mover behind the petition in support of Father McElroy. One might speculate that with four members of the Lawrence family signing the petition, one of them might have been the organizer of the generous gesture to counter bigotry's nay. But despite the moral weight of "the McElroy twenty-five," bigotry carried the day. The various city bodies debated, deferred, re-debated, and ultimately defeated Father McElroy's cause, and not until three years later, in July 1857, did he receive city clearance for the purchase of land in the South End, where Boston College was finally located.

While Amos Lawrence spent some time in the early 1850s trying to help solve the travail of Father McElroy, he had on his mind a moral and political problem of vaster dimensions — namely, slavery. The idea of armed conflict to solve the problem hovered over the country like an ominous cloud, but in the years before the Civil War, earnest citizens sought democratic and pacific ways at least to contain slavery to the states where it already existed. To this end, Amos Lawrence became a leading figure in promoting an operation called the New England Emigrant Aid Company, whose purpose was to facilitate the moving of anti-slave citizens from New England to Kansas and Nebraska, areas which were already being settled by emigrants from slave states. Other similar organizations in the Midwest and Far West came into being. The result was that anti-slavery sentiment eventually prevailed in Kansas.

Amos Lawrence was treasurer of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, and in that position he put some of his own money into



The house Amos Lawrence built in 1851 in the Longwood section of Brookline in his search for a more "rural" atmosphere than that of his previous residence in Boston's Pemberton Square.

insuring the success of the effort. In recognition of his contributions, one area of Kansas where many New England people settled adopted the name Lawrence. Amos Lawrence donated \$10,000 for a college in the town. No action to establish a college was taken before the war erupted, but at war's end, when Kansas legislators were about to start a state university, they chose Lawrence as its location because of the gift from Amos Lawrence, ready to be used. Amos Lawrence also endowed Lawrence College (now Lawrence University) in the state of Wisconsin in a town named Appleton, for Lawrence's father-in-law.

In his private life, Amos Lawrence was property hunting at the same time as Father McElroy. The Lawrence family had lived for generations in bucolic Groton, and Amos had spent happy years there as a youth. Not surprisingly, he felt pent up in Boston, where he lived in Pemberton Square, with a family that eventually included seven children. In 1851 Lawrence purchased about a hundred acres of land in Brookline, only two miles from the center of Boston. On his new property stood a house called the "Cottage Farm," which gave its name for many years to the bridge now known as the Boston University Bridge. Lawrence built a stone house (also dubbed



Cottage Farm) in the English cottage style, which was his home until his death.<sup>8</sup> Lawrence's property was what is now known as the Longwood section of Brookline.

In the biography of his father, Bishop Lawrence described the development of the Brookline property:<sup>9</sup>

From the first day that he moved to Longwood, in 1851, he joined with his brother in laying out their tract of land, planting trees, opening up roads, and building houses; so that within a few years the Cottage Farm was covered with a cluster of stone and brick cottages, which, hidden behind trees and hedges, gave it the appearance of a private park. And as the first object was the creation of a pleasant neighborhood, the houses were always filled with families who joined with each other in making a delightful and refined community.

Thus, though he may not have thought of it in these terms, in moving out of the heart of Boston Amos Lawrence had not only provided himself with a quiet, semi-rural residence, but at the same time he and his brother became real estate developers, creating a "refined community" around them. But the very development of his property caused Amos Lawrence once again to long for open space. This is the way his son described the next property acquisition:<sup>10</sup>

In 1862 Mr. Lawrence anticipated the approach of Boston, which is now [at Lawrence's invitation] converting Cottage Farm into city streets, and bought a farm of over 100 acres about three miles further out of town, on a part of the tract formerly occupied by the chief Waban and his tribe. It was an unrealized dream that he might retire [Lawrence was 48 when he purchased the future site of Boston College] to Waban Farm as Boston approached Longwood. But the city soon took a large slice of his tract for the bed of the "Lawrence Basin" of the Chestnut Hill Reservoir, and thus deprived it of its bucolic aspect. However for twenty years this place was his autumn home, and to it he rode almost every day in the year, superintending the plowing, sowing, and reaping, planting nurseries and fruit-trees, pruning and grafting, overseeing the dairy, and giving play to his taste for farming and country life which his ancestry from Wisset, England to Groton had cultivated from necessity.

The above paragraph, brief as it is, is crammed with insights into Lawrence's tastes and his relationship to the farm that became the University's campus. One concludes from the end of the cited para-



A photograph of Amos Lawrence's house at Chestnut Hill taken "about 1870" according to Amos's son, Bishop William Lawrence. This is one of the two photos of the Lawrence property Bishop Lawrence sent to Father Louis Gallagher. The view is from Beacon Street. The house was located about where Gasson Hall now stands.





The second photograph of the Lawrence Chestnut Hill farm presented to Boston College by Bishop William Lawrence. The photo was taken from the hill across Commonwealth Avenue from the campus. It shows Lawrence's barns and the reservoir made from his land and acquired by Boston College in 1949. Note how undeveloped the property was along Beacon Street opposite the Lawrence farm.

graph that Lawrence purchased a commercial farm that embraced a variety of operations — fruits, vegetables, and dairy — and simply kept it going. The Lawrence family spent the fall months there in the original farmhouse. In other seasons, Amos visited the farm daily by horse. (He was a horseman all his life.)

Although currently a district of Newton in the western part of the city bears the name Waban, the Lawrence family believed that their property once was owned by Chief Waban; hence they called their “country” home the Waban Farm. Bishop Lawrence intimates in the beginning of the paragraph that his father planned to spend his latter days at the farm. Because its “bucolic aspect” was lost when the lower part of the property became a back-up body of water for the Chestnut Hill Reservoir, however, the elder Lawrence’s retirement to the Waban Farm remained “an unrealized dream.” We will see later the significance for Boston College of Lawrence’s reluctant decision to sell the eastern part of his property.

In 1864, the year that Boston College accepted its first students, Lawrence purchased a home in Nahant. His diary noted on July 17:<sup>11</sup> “We moved to Nahant, to our new house on the rocks, and are all well pleased with it. The addition which I have made to it has a good piazza all around both stories, and the sea view is excellent.” With Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s summer home on one side of him and Oliver Wendell Holmes’ on the other, and with other interesting neighbors around him, Lawrence enjoyed his Nahant residence, which provided him with a lively society as well as a pleasing ocean environment.

Lawrence’s Newton and Nahant purchases were made during the great war between the states, a fact that might indicate a less than total concern about or commitment to the nation’s tragic convulsion. But when Lawrence’s daily expressions of anguish and prayer about the war are considered, the real estate acquisitions simply indicate how life went on in the midst of the cataclysm and potential disaster. Boston College itself was an example of the anomalous coexistence of war and business as usual. Although the college buildings and the supporting Church of the Immaculate Conception were completed before the war erupted, their construction in the years 1857 to 1860 showed that Father McElroy and the Jesuits courageously went forward with their plans, even though the country was on the brink of war. And then in 1863, with the conflict raging, the Commonwealth granted the College a charter, and the following year, with the war at its climax, Boston College opened.

No College catalog was printed until 1868, with the war over, so we do not have that kind of public document which might have referred



In Bishop Lawrence's autobiography, he includes this photograph of his father, with a caption, "Amos A. Lawrence at Nahant." And below that, a second line in quotation marks: "Over fifty years on horseback." The quote was undoubtedly from Amos Lawrence, an enthusiastic horseman.

to the war. It is surprising, however, that in the few surviving early Boston College documents there is no reference to the war. The conflict ended in April 1865, during the first year of the College's existence. Of course there was no graduation, but it was decided that there should be a display of student talent at the end of the academic year. A two-day "exhibition" was held in late June. The first evening there were oral examinations on most of the studies covered during the year, plus music and declamations. The second evening there was a presentation of a sacred drama, *Joseph and His Brethren*, followed by the distribution of academic prizes. We can only speculate whether,

had the war still raged, there would have been acknowledgement of its horror. But the exhibition made no reference to the recent disastrous conflict, unless one declamation on the subject of patriotism was intended as an affirmation of the Union cause.

The one recorded mention of the conflict by someone at Boston College during the war years was in a letter from Father John Bapst, the College's first president, to Father General Pieter Beckx in Rome in February 1865, only two months before Lee's surrender and the war's end. Bapst wrote: "The Civil War, which rages so furiously, makes everything uncertain and precarious. Before the end of the war, so it is feared, there will be famine, want and great distress. . . . Since in the past God's mercy has aided us so, we have reason to hope that He will not fail us in the tribulations that await us."<sup>12</sup>

Father Bapst was born in Switzerland in 1816. (Thus he was two years younger than Amos Lawrence.) In 1830, shortly after his ordination as a Jesuit, he was missioned to Maine to care for Indians. There he faced the daunting task of learning both English and the Penobscot language. He spent thirteen arduous years in Maine. With such a limited contact with national events, Bapst may well have been more pessimistic in February 1865 than more sophisticated northerners. But then, the war had dragged on so long and tragically that Bapst's February views may have been common after the avalanches of unhappy war news.

In any case, from the war's beginning, Amos Lawrence's diary (in excerpts provided in his son's biography) expressed grave concern, desperation, and grief, tempered by faith in God. On the last day of 1860 he wrote: "A sad ending of one year in the history of my country; I fear, the last year of our happy union."<sup>13</sup> With the war three years old, the diary recorded: "1864 May 8. Sunday . . . Severe fighting, but no great victory. Eight thousand wounded and sent to the rear of Meade's army. Spare us, O God, from defeat. Give us victory. Give us peace."<sup>14</sup> "May 11. The battle still raging in Virginia. Grant gains ground. Major General Sedgwick killed. May God give us the victory and confound the enemy."<sup>15</sup> "May 12. Mary's [his daughter] wedding. . . . The fighting continues. Very bloody, very desperate at times. General Stevenson of Boston killed; a good officer. May the Lord of Hosts give our brave army the victory. He alone can do it. June 21. Wounded men are seen everywhere; in the streets, on the railroad cars, at the railroad station. Some badly maimed. Certainly there never were so many maimed men in one nation before, and the graves! And the sorrowing hearts! O God, how long?"<sup>16</sup>

After the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1862, Governor John Andrews (whose signature was placed on the Boston College



charter in April 1863) on February 9, 1863, invited Amos Lawrence to serve on a committee to advise and consult with the governor in the organizing and recruiting of a colored regiment of volunteers.<sup>17</sup> Lawrence wrote on May 28th that the 54th Regiment, the first full colored regiment in the country, marched to Boston Common. He described its leader, Colonel Robert G. Shaw, as “youthful, handsome, sensible, determined, a model for a hero.” Lawrence wrote:<sup>18</sup>

All Boston turned out to see the first regiment of negroes that had ever been raised in the Northern States. The officers are all educated gentlemen, and Shaw rode with Lieutenant-Colonel Hallowell (whose arm was still in a sling) at the head of the column. He was splendid. I stationed myself outside the window on a projection of one of the stone stores on Franklin Street, and as they came up playing and the people cheering from the street, and from the houses, with flags flaunting, it was indeed a grand and novel sight. The troops marched beautifully. When Shaw and his staff came opposite, I hailed him and bid him adieu. He raised his hat to me, and waved it toward me twice, at the same time speaking to Hallowell, who did the same. May God bless these dear youths. May God save our country from its foes. May God help this government to crush rebellion, and to crush with it — slavery. Would to God, would to God, I could fight these battles for these young men.

The Lawrence household was religious. William Lawrence recalls the daily routine during his childhood:<sup>19</sup>

Every morning we went to father's or mother's dressing-room to say our prayers, then came breakfast and family prayers which the servants, who were always Protestants [that is, not Irish], attended. After breakfast we were off to school, and father on his horse for Harvard College [Lawrence was treasurer of the College from 1857 to 1860], or Boston. On Sundays we started at quarter before nine for Sunday School. Mother followed in the big coach and we met at church, filling two pews, and then came home to cold roast beef, baked potatoes, and a cold pie or pudding; for the servants were given a day of rest. In the afternoon father drove the older of us to church while mother stayed home to read to the younger children.

Lawrence may not have wanted Catholics as family servants, yet he was concerned for the religious welfare of his Catholic factory workers. As early as 1843 he recorded, “Went to see the Bishop [Benedict Fenwick] this week about sending a Roman Catholic clergyman down

to Salmon Falls [on the border of New Hampshire and Maine] to look after the spiritual interests of the girls, of whom one third are Irish.”<sup>20</sup> And family benevolence toward Irish Catholics was not limited to the head of the Lawrence household. The official history of the Archdiocese of Boston noted that in the post-Civil War era, Boston “swarmed” with Irish “working-out girls,” many of whom had no friends in the city and so, in case of sickness or unemployment, might find themselves in a troubling situation. To deal with this problem, a few Catholic young ladies in 1866 founded a “home for sick and friendless servant girls” in three rented rooms. “Their undertaking aroused the sympathy of wealthy Protestants, from whom generous contributions were soon forthcoming (the subscription list is studded with such names as those of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Mrs. Samuel Gridley Howe, or Mrs. Amos Lawrence).”<sup>21</sup>

Lawrence’s father died in 1853. After the Longwood property was purchased and developed by Amos and his brother William, in 1867 they built the Episcopal Church of Our Savior on Monmouth Street in Brookline in their father’s memory. Also in 1867 Lawrence joined a board to determine the location of a proposed Episcopal Theological School. His son William, the future Episcopal bishop, wrote that his father saw a long-desired opportunity to bring a more positive religious element into the neighborhood of Harvard College:<sup>22</sup>

The religious influences at Cambridge had been a source of anxiety to him, and he had always felt that the identification of a Unitarian Divinity School with the college was a positive injury to both, and as a member of the corporation he had urged some change. When, therefore, the question of a site for the Theological School was raised, and when some of Mr. Reed’s [the principal donor] friends advised strongly against Cambridge on account of its Unitarian and negative religious influence, Mr. Lawrence joined with others in pressing the establishment of the site in Cambridge, and as near the college as possible. They felt convinced (and experience has justified their conviction) that the contact with the university life would be an advantage to the school, and that the school and its chapel might exert a positive influence on the life of the university.

The decision was made to locate the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge. Amos Lawrence underwrote the cost of one of the buildings on the new campus, a student residence now known as Lawrence Hall.

Amos Lawrence died in 1886 in his seventy-second year. Many Boston College people believe that, 21 years later, Father Gasson pur-



chased the "Waban" farm from the Lawrence family. At some point between Amos Lawrence's death and Gasson's search for a new campus, however, the Chestnut Hill property was sold, and Gasson had to buy *four* parcels: one owned by E.S. Eldridge on Commonwealth Avenue, an adjoining parcel owned by the Provident Institute of Savings, a third tract owned by Henry J. Shaw and the Mt. Auburn Cemetery Association, and a fourth parcel on Beacon and South Street (now College Road) owned by the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company.<sup>23</sup>

Fortunately, a granddaughter of Amos Lawrence, Bishop William Lawrence's daughter, Marian, kept a diary as a child and left a brief glimpse of the Lawrence farmhouse in the years immediately after her grandfather's death. Perhaps an introductory paragraph from Marian Peabody's autobiography about the grandfather's Cottage Farm may set the stage for the Chestnut Hill reference:<sup>24</sup>

My grandfather and grandmother [Amos and Sarah] Lawrence lived at Cottage Farm, which is now the Longwood section of Brookline. My grandfather named his place Cottage Farm and the railroad took the name as its station. The bridge now known as Boston University Bridge was called the Cottage Farm Bridge. After the Civil War, a large library with deeply recessed windows was built onto the Longwood house, and in the stone around the windows were cut the names of the battles of the war — they are still there, though the house has been moved into a corner of the old place and the rest cut up into many house lots. Here we often stayed and always came for Thanksgiving and Christmas parties.

Grandpa also had a farm at Chestnut Hill overlooking the reservoir. It was the land now occupied by Boston College but was then beautiful farming land with an old farmhouse on it. My grandparents went there to stay between seasons, but in my day it was more often occupied by a newly married aunt and uncle. Aunt Susie Loring had the family dinner there on Thanksgiving in 1887: [There follows an excerpt from Marian Peabody's diary that was included in the book.]

"In the morning we went to church. P.M. we played Prisoner's Base on Hawthorne Street. In the evening we went to the Farm to dinner. Seventeen were there. First course, raw oysters; second course, thick and thin soups; third course, two kinds of fish; fourth, patties; fifth, turkey, cranberries, celery, potato and peas; sixth, ducks, rice birds and salads; seventh, plum pudding, four kinds of pie,

wine jelly and Charlotte Russe; eighth, ice cream and cocoanut cakes; ninth, fruit and candy. In the middle of dinner Amos [her brother] had to run up and down the stairs so that he could eat some more, and he took off his vest, it got so tight."

Thanksgiving 1887 was the second Thanksgiving after Amos Lawrence's death, and we can assume that the nine-course dinner menu continued a culinary tradition set by the original paterfamilias of the Lawrence Farm.

In December 1907 the Lawrence Farm (minus the piece that Amos Lawrence reluctantly allowed to become a small reservoir next to the Chestnut Hill Reservoir) was the property of Boston College. Through four presidencies — those of Fathers Gasson, Lyons, Devlin, and Dolan — perhaps not much thought was given to the Lawrence family. Then, in January 1934, Father Louis Gallagher, who succeeded Father James Dolan as president in 1932, received a gracious letter from Episcopal Bishop William Lawrence. This is the same William Lawrence, son of Amos, whose 1888 *Life of Amos A. Lawrence* we have been quoting. In 1924 Bishop Lawrence was in retirement at age 85. He wrote:<sup>25</sup>

*My Dear Dr. Gallagher,*

*I take pleasure in sending through you to Boston College these two photographs of the site of the College taken about 1870. In 1862 or 3 my father, Amos A. Lawrence, bought about one hundred acres of land of which the College site is now about the centre. About 1866-7 the City of Boston took the low land for the Reservoir, that part now called the "Lower Basin." It was then a farm and we passed several months in each year in the house which stood where the College now is. This view was taken from near Beacon Street. The view below is taken from the slope of Waban Hill. The road in the foreground is now widened to Commonwealth Avenue; the stone wall and stone barn were built by my father; Chestnut Hill is beyond. Wild rabbits ran through the grove and our cherry orchard where I ate my fill of cherries is at the point where the Athletic Field now is.*

*Boston College with its beautiful group of buildings has given a grace and a Benediction to my boyhood haunts.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*William Lawrence.*

*Rev. L. J. Gallagher, S.J.  
President*



Bishop William Lawrence, son of Amos Lawrence and author of his father's biography. In 1934 he presented the then president of Boston College, Father Louis Gallagher, with two 1870 photographs of the Chestnut Hill site of Boston College.

In 1934 the “beautiful group of buildings” Bishop Lawrence alluded to were Gasson Hall, St. Mary’s Hall, Devlin Hall, and Bapst Library — the original architectural gems. The athletic field, where he says cherry trees grew, is the Alumni Field dedicated in 1915, on what students now call the Dust Bowl.

The two interesting photographs of the Lawrence family’s Chestnut Hill farm are precious for giving Boston College visual evidence of the site of the campus in the late nineteenth century. The photographs had been in the family’s possession since 1870. Why were they given to



A watercolor painting called "Reservoir from Waban Farm," by Hetty Lawrence Cunningham, Amos Lawrence's daughter. The painting is dated 1884, two years before Amos's death. The artist's daughter, Mrs. John T. Coolidge, presented it to Boston College. It is reproduced here courtesy of the Boston College McMullen Museum of Art. (*Photograph by Gary Gilbert.*)



the College in 1934? It could be that Bishop Lawrence, in retirement, was going through family records and possessions, as people often do as they grow older, to distribute among grandchildren, grandnieces, and grandnephews, relics of family history. Coming across the farm photos, he may have thought they would mean more to Boston College than to any of the Lawrence clan in 1934.

But there may be, speculatively, another explanation of the Bishop's kind letter and presentation to Father Gallagher. In the late 1960s Father Gallagher wrote a manuscript, largely biographical, whose focus was on his experiences in Russia at the inception of the Communist takeover, during 1921 to 1923, as a diplomatic representative of the Vatican and, unofficially, of the U.S. State Department. Toward the end of the document, as a sort of postscript, he devoted fifteen pages to his presidency of Boston College from 1932 to 1937. The second paragraph of this section introduces the then president of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell. Father Gallagher wrote:

In the dubious days of the early '30's, perhaps the most experienced as well as the most sagacious authority on the question of the American college presidency was A. Lawrence Lowell, the President of Harvard College. He retired in 1933, after twenty-four years in office, and for one just going into the office of college president it was a decided privilege to make the acquaintance of this erudite and amiable gentleman. The first invitation I received as new President of Boston College was a request from Harvard to attend a dinner given in honor of a visiting Don from Oxford. The invitation closed with the words, "We hope your first official visit as President of Boston College will be made to Harvard," and it was, in early January of 1932. This visit was also the occasion of first acquaintance with the venerable President of America's oldest university.

Lowell's invitation was certainly a gracious and perhaps ecumenical gesture to a new president of a neighboring college. Evidently Father Gallagher's urbane and genial manner impressed Lowell at that first meeting, because a personal — not just institutional — relationship developed between the veteran and the beginning president. Father Gallagher's account continued: "At several later meetings in his house at Harvard and at his home on Marlboro Street in Boston, after his retirement, it was surprising to learn how interested he was in the Society of Jesus and in the growth and progress of Boston College."<sup>26</sup>

President Lowell and Bishop Lawrence were related, for Lowell's mother was the daughter of Abbott Lawrence, brother of the bishop's grandfather. The Lawrences were a close-knit clan, and it is very likely

that the retired Harvard president spoke to the retired bishop about the interesting new president at Boston College, and this may have moved the bishop to write his cordial letter to Father Gallagher.<sup>27</sup> Whatever prompted Bishop Lawrence to send Father Gallagher the 1870 photographs of the site of the Boston College campus, both the Episcopal bishop and Harvard's president demonstrated friendly courtesy to the Boston College president.

The final chapter in the Boston College–Lawrence family story is the reclamation of the eastern section of Amos Lawrence's original property, the land beneath the water of the small reservoir. First, we here put in print for the first time the events leading to Boston College's acquisition of that reservoir. Joseph McKenney of the class of 1927, captain of the football team and later football coach for a few years, served two five-year terms (1938 to 1948) on the Metropolitan District Commission, which had jurisdiction over the Chestnut Hill Reservoir and the small back-up reservoir adjoining the Boston College campus. In response to a letter from the author about the circumstances surrounding the University's acquisition of the reservoir, McKenney visited him and gave the following explanation. During World War II, Tufts University was seeking the establishment of a Naval ROTC unit, although it had no body of water of its own on or near its campus. Because the presence of such water would enhance its petition for a Naval ROTC unit, Tufts approached the Metropolitan District Commission about use of the old Medford Hillside Reservoir. Investigation showed that the reservoir was inactive, so the MDC chairman brought the matter to the Commission and received approval for Tufts' use of the reservoir.

After the meeting, Joe McKenney told the chairman that he thought the Commission had made the correct decision. He added that he hoped, should a Chestnut Hill reservoir become inactive, a similar arrangement could be made with Boston College. The chairman said he was agreeable, and they shook hands on it.

In 1948 the chairman called McKenney to tell him that the small reservoir near Boston College had been declared inactive and reminded him of their agreement about transferring it to Boston College. The trustees of the university were at first puzzled as to what would be done with the reservoir, but they did agree to purchase it for a reasonable sum. And, of course, that purchase has proved to be almost Boston College's version of Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase.

And where does Amos Lawrence fit into the story of Boston College's regaining the lower part of Lawrence's original property? When Lawrence reluctantly sold that tract of land for the reservoir, he may have unknowingly saved it for Boston College by putting it under



water for 82 years. Early in the twentieth century, as streetcars ran to the Boston city limits, Bostonians began to move to new homes in the suburbs, commuting to work in the city. The Boston streetcars ended at Lake Street, and the property adjacent to transportation would have been the most prized for residential development. This is not merely speculation: The University has copies of developers' plans for homes on the central campus from Commonwealth Avenue to the location of Fulton Hall, with streets laid out and named, and the number of houses indicated. The date on that development map is 1907, the very year that Father Gasson purchased the Chestnut Hill property. Had the lower campus not been under water, it is highly likely that that area would have been developed before Gasson was president.

Amos Lawrence's son, Bishop William Lawrence, graciously wrote to Father Gallagher that Boston College has given a grace and benediction to his boyhood haunts. In reviewing the relations of the Lawrences to Boston College, it is properly concluded that the Lawrences, often overtly, sometimes unknowingly, have been a blessing and a boon to Boston College. It is in recognition of their presence and their kindnesses that the Office of Publications and Print Marketing, at 122 College Road, proudly bears the name Lawrence House.

## ENDNOTES

1. William Lawrence, *Life of Amos A. Lawrence* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), pp. 23–24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–48.
5. Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., “Origins of Boston College, 1842–1869,” *Thought*, 17 (December 1942), p. 640.
6. Thomas H. LeDuc, *Piety and Intellect at Amherst College, 1865–1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 5.
7. *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, p. 55.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
12. Father Bapst to Father Beckx, February 16, 1865. Father Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., cites this letter from the Jesuit General Archives in Rome in an article in *Thought* magazine, December 1942, p. 655. Garraghan’s article is entitled “Origins of Boston College, 1842–1869.”
13. *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, p. 165.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
19. William Lawrence, D.D., *Memories of a Happy Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 27.
20. *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, p. 53.
21. Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston* (Boston: The Pilot Publishing Company, 1945), Vol. 3, p. 371.
22. *Life of Amos A. Lawrence*, pp. 241–242.
23. Charles F. Donovan, S.J., David R. Dunigan, S.J., and Paul A. FitzGerald, S.J., *History of Boston College: From the Beginnings to 1990* (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: The University Press of Boston College, 1990), p. 118.
24. Marian Lawrence Peabody, *To Be Young Was Very Heaven* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 9.
25. Boston College Archives.
26. The Boston College Archives has a typescript of Father Gallagher’s proposed book, *Recollections of a Jesuit Cossack*, which had been submitted to the Archdiocesan Chancery Office for clearance for publication. The *Imprimatur* was granted in July 1971, but the author died the following August and his recollections have not been published. The cited passages are on pages 184 and 185 of the typescript.

27. The closeness of the Lawrences and related families is illustrated by a passage from Amos Lawrence's granddaughter's autobiography, *To Be Young Was Very Heaven* (p. 361). Marian Lawrence, the granddaughter, wrote of her keeping company with Harold Peabody for a period of time and notes, "At last on Christmas Harold and I became engaged. It must have been the Christmas spirit." Then she quotes her diary for that day: "Dec. 25, 1905. Grandpa Peabody had five children, Jack, Cotty, Frank, Martha, and George. Jack, Frank, and Martha all married Lawrences, and Cotty married his first cousin, Fanny Peabody; George was the only one who married out of the family. . . . When the second generation began to marry, Marian married her first cousin, Jim Lawrence, and so we were the fifth such combination without any break, and what then was the use of fighting fate?"

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